

CARNEGIE INSTITUTION OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF EMBRYOLOGY
WOLFE AND MADISON STREETS
BALTIMORE 5, MARYLAND

July 15, 1959

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics
Stanford University
School of Medicine
Stanford, California

Dear Josh:

For several years I have been concerned with the content and quality of teaching of basic biology at high school and introductory college levels. The newer concepts of cellular and molecular biology are, with a few notable exceptions, not taught in our colleges, hence not in the high schools. Most elementary courses are cut and dried, failing to arouse the enthusiasm of the better students. Perhaps I am motivated to think about these problems because my own children are nearing high school age — or perhaps because in leaving university ranks for my present position I gave up personal contact with students — apart from graduate students. But leaving my personal motivations aside, I am writing specifically to try to persuade you (if persuasion is necessary) to play an important role in the teaching of basic college biology. Several of us are planning a new venture, a series of basic biology books, in cooperation with Rinehart and Company. We expect to publish a Basic Biology Series, oriented about cell biology, a series of eight short books, which we hope will replace the conventional general biology textbook. Each of these books, which will be about 150 pages long, will be written not just by someone well schooled in the subject, but by someone who is capable of presenting new ideas with enthusiasm, with zest — in the new setting demanded by the problems that are evolving. In short we seek an unconventional and inspiring, yet precise approach. We would like very much to have manuscripts for the first four volumes (Cell Biology, Genetics, Growth and Development, Evolution) in hand by about January, 1961. Ariel Loewy who has been teaching an exciting course in Cell Biology at Haverford will do the book on Cell Biology, and I am tackling the book on Growth and Development. We would like very much to have you present the elements of genetics, as you see them,

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to beginning students. It will not be easy to present one's ideas in about 150 pages — it will take imagination and serious thought — and hard work — to produce something other than a series of notes.

You may ask why Rinehart instead of one of the publishers usually associated with biology textbooks? This is a new venture; Rinehart pioneered in producing first-rate works (low cost, often paper-back, as we believe our series should be) in other fields, e.g. English — and is now prepared to enter the field of biology. They are anxious that their debut be successful from the point of view of scholarship (as well as being a commercial success). We are assured of full cooperation — the best artist available — etc. I hardly need add that I expect the series to be financially rewarding to the authors. In fact, Rinehart has prepared a very generous and unusual contract.

I know how busy you must be in establishing your new laboratory and in tackling the problems of somatic cell genetics. At the same time, your leadership in the latter area makes it all the more important that you think seriously about this invitation. I do hope you will elect to talk further about it; you name the place and time.

Do you see Cliff Grobstein often? Please give him my best.

Cordially yours,


James D. Ebert

JDE:egl